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The Level of Preparedness among the Local Governments of the Katowice Conurbation for Risks Associated with Depopulation and Ageing of the Population

Jerzy Runge, Tomasz Michalski and Anna Runge

Abstract:

The Katowice conurbation is the largest traditional economic region in Central Europe and simultaneously a complex settlement system. Yet it faces numerous problems. The article attempts to answer the questions: (1) Does the hitherto relatively uniform economic structure of the Katowice conurbation, based on mining and metallurgy, cause similar intensities of depopulation, demographic ageing and urban shrinkage in 16 neighbouring towns? (2) Is the scope of policies mitigating the effects of these processes similar? The analysis of statistical data for 1999 and 2018 and the development strategies of individual towns shows that both the trends in population changes and the policies adopted towards them differ. The severity of the negative processes varies, with the largest being in Katowice, Sosnowiec and Bytom. Most towns recognize the problem yet consider its solution through selective actions (improvement in housing conditions, development of services or launching new industrial activities). There are also towns that, although seeing problems, marginalize them in their development strategies. Only Czeladź has a multifaceted approach to this problem. The general conclusion shows a need to coordinate the policies of local governments of the entire conurbation for the benefit of multifaceted measures to mitigate depopulation, demographic ageing and urban shrinkage.

Keywords: depopulation, ageing of the population, urban policy, the Katowice conurbation.

Introduction

After the collapse of the system of real socialism in Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the 20th century, processes leading to the development of democracy and to improving the living conditions of the population were initiated (Gorzelak, 1996; Haček, 2016). These are high intensity processes, reflecting global trends, such as globalisation (Chang & Lee, 2010; Drahokoupil, 2009) or population changes within the second demographic transition (Sobotka, 2008; Wilson, 2013). However, many processes in Central and Eastern Europe differ due to the specificity of the political and economic transformation and social changes of different strength and impact in particular countries (Kollmorgen, 2013; Norkus, 2012). While in Western European countries the post-war political and economic integration processes corresponded to the processes of social modernisation, in Central and Eastern Europe political transformation and privatisation of economy were initiated only at the turn of the 1980s and the 1990s. They triggered significant changes in the spatial redistribution of the population (suburbanisation, depopulation of cities) (Parysek, 2005) as well as in the intensification of the migratory outflow and demographic ageing.

This paper focuses on the meeting of two processes: depopulation and ageing, on the one hand, and utilization of the recovered subjectivity by local authorities on the other hand. A process called urban shrinkage is the common ground (cf. Haase, Rink & Grossmann, 2016; Strykiewicz & Jaroszewska, 2016). It raises certain consequences and, hence, challenges for the regional and urban policy. Therefore, the main aim of this study is to assess the degree of preparedness among the local governments of the main cities of the Katowice conurbation to manage the risks arising from depopulation and demographic ageing.

Although the process called the ‘second demographic transition’ is happening across Europe, its scope and negative effects are now particularly noticeable in the post-socialist European countries. A significant decline in the birth rate combined with extending life expectancy results in the rapid ageing of populations in these countries (cf. Pruszyński & Putz, 2016; Lesthaeghe, 2011). Depopulation and ageing are further exacerbated by negative migratory trends (cf. Klüsener et al., 2015; Lapuh, 2011). With regard to urban demographic problems, suburbanisation processes are a factor triggering a synergistic effect (cf. Šprocha et al., 2016; Kučera & Burcin, 2009). Industrial and post-industrial regions are particularly affected by depopulation and ageing (Mykhnenko, Myedvyedev & Kuzienko, 2010; Runge, 2008).

Regaining subjectivity by the regional and local government is one of the most important consequences of the political transformation in European post-socialist countries (cf. Bobáková, 2017; Kovač, 2011). This was accompanied by a whole range of other processes, both of an exogenous nature, such as the influence of the European Union’s patterns (cf. Apostolache, 2014; Ivan & Iov, 2010) or the implementation of e-governance (cf. Mäeltsemees, Madise & Vinkel, 2016; Todevski, Janesca-Sarakanjac & Tarajanov, 2016), and of an endogenous nature, such as decentralization of power (cf. Oplotnik, 2012; Udovychenko et al., 2017) or actions to change the administrative division to “optimal” municipalities (cf. Campbell & Coulson, 2006; Rakar, Tičar & Klunl, 2015).

The aforementioned determinants and processes as well as their consequences are especially concentrated in highly urbanised and industrialised areas. The Katowice conurbation, located in southern Poland, is an example of such an area. It used to be a region of traditional industry based on raw materials (mainly coal), characterised by a huge labour market – also for the commuting workforce. The impact of immigration on creating local labour resources that lasted from the 18th century until the early 1980s, when the attractiveness of the labour market decreased along with a waning investment boom. The ongoing population regress of towns began in 1996. In the following years, there was a positive balance of migration in rural areas – the process of suburbanisation began. Today, the conurbation is a complex settlement system of an emigrant character. The conurbation consists of 9 large cities (above 100,000 inhabitants), 12 medium-size towns (20,000–100,000), 12 small towns (less than 20,000 inhabitants) and 20 rural municipalities (Fig. 1). The spatial scope of this study comprises 16 cities and medium-sized towns that are local administrative units (LAU-2).

In the Katowice conurbation, shaped by spontaneous industrialization processes and until 1939 located on the border of three countries with different rules of administrative organisation, it is impossible to explicitly apply the terms ‘city’ and ‘town’ to settlement units. This study assumes that a city has a population of over 100,000 inhabitants, a town below 100,000 (tab.1, Fig. 1), and when talking about towns in general (without a specific indication) we use “town”.

The temporal scope of the study in terms of demographic changes covers the years 1999–2018, while in terms of the analysis of local government documents it concerns the regional and local policy objectives for the years 2020–2030 (Strategia..., 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d, 2014e, 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2018).

Research on depopulation, demographic ageing and the process of shrinking cities is conducted by many scientific disciplines. As Sosiński pointed out (2014), various scenarios of action in the urban or regional policy are possible in the event of the emergence, maintenance or worsening of the negative population changes. Depending on the intensity of these processes, their negative impact gradually affects various spheres of socio-economic activity, often resulting in the emergence of the so-called circular causality character of city shrinkage (Hoekveld, 2012). However, a key question arises: in the case of complex settlements, are the courses and consequences of the processes of depopulation and demographic ageing similar? The mere analysis of complex types of settlements carried out by Blotenvogel (1983) or Kunzmann (2010) shows that, in the first case, this depends on the degree to which the functional structure of particular towns in the settlement system are diversified, and, in the second case, on the location of those towns within the system (centre, external zone, surroundings). Therefore, the less diversified the functional structure of cities, the more intense the processes of depopulation and ageing. The cities located in the central part of the Katowice conurbation had a monofunctional (poorly

diversified) structure – mining and metallurgy dominated here (Ruda Śląska, Chorzów, Siemianowice Śląskie, Świętochłowice). On the other hand, cities located in the outer conurbation zone had a more diversified functional structure – there were various branches of the processing industry as well as transport and housing functions (Tychy, Tarnowskie Góry, Mikołów). As a result, the transformation processes of individual towns not only differ from one another but, more importantly, the trends in population changes may be different from the economic processes, which was proved by Kłosowski et al. (2013) based on the example of the Katowice conurbation. The proximity of towns with different functions, both in relation to the centre of the system and in relation to each other, as well as convenient internal transport and historical traditions of different types of migration between towns, result in the complementarity of socio-economic links within this conurbation. It manifests itself in the mutual complementing of functions and socio-economic obligations. This is favoured by the polycentricity of the settlement system, with the poorly shaped domination of Katowice in terms of the population size and its strong domination in terms of the labour market. Simultaneously, the depopulation pace in Katowice is significant despite a strong labour market affecting the entire conurbation (Runge, 2014).



Figure 1: Administrative units that are part of the Katowice conurbation, state at the end of 2018

Notes: 1 – the border of the Silesian Voivodeship; 2 – the border of the Katowice conurbation; 3 – the border of municipalities; 4 – cities (over 100,000 inhabitants); 5 – medium-size towns (20,000–99,999 inhabitants); 6 – small towns (below 20,000 inhabitants); 7 – urban-rural municipalities; 8 – rural municipalities.

Legend: B. – Będzin; Ch. – Chorzów; Or. – Ornontowice; P.Śl. – Piekary Śląskie; R. – Radzionków; S.Śl. – Siemianowice Śląskie; Św. – Świętochłowice; W. – Wojkowice.

Source: own study.

This study used the desk research method (Czarniawska, 2014). In addition, while analysing documents prepared by local authorities, the factors of development were identified in them, with a breakdown into exogenous factors, endogenous factors, structural factors, traditional factors (cf. Ezcurra, Pascual & Rapún, 2007; Smętowski, 2018), and an interval scale. This was used to assess the level of preparedness and the involvement of local governments in solving problems resulting from urban shrinkage, in particular depopulation and ageing (Runge & Runge, 2017). Urban shrinkage is a multifaceted process, and in addition to depopulation it includes regress in building development, urban infrastructure and economic functions. In this scale, three states were distinguished:

- clear involvement of local governments in solving these problems, manifested by formulating an urban policy aimed at taking preventive measures to curb unfavourable processes and at preventing their negative effects, as well as institutional and social solutions for the spatial-functional and social structure of towns changing under the influence of these processes;
- lack of any action;
- taking various substitute or surface actions, which are not necessarily related to the local population situation.

The collected data came from three main sources: (1) demographic data from Statistics Poland (Local Data Bank); (2) selected studies, mentioned earlier, which were prepared for the needs of the self-government of the Silesian Voivodeship, and individual local governments of particular municipalities; (3) scientific publications.

Research and Discussion

Demographic changes

A large part of Poland is threatened by depopulation, and in some parts the process is already advanced. A bipolar system is developing: on the one hand, the role of Warsaw in populating the country is increasing; on the other hand, the strongest population loss and the most advanced demographic ageing are recorded in the Opole, Łódź, Świętokrzyskie and Silesian Voivodeships. While in the years 1999–2018 the largest percentage of population loss was recorded in the Opole Voivodeship (-8.2%), in absolute numbers, the largest population loss was recorded in the Silesian Voivodeship (-243,291 people), which was accompanied by an increase in the proportion of the population aged 60 years and over from 16.1% to 26.2%. The Katowice conurbation plays a leading role in generating these processes in the Silesian Voivodeship.

The economic and settlement structure of the conurbation was shaped by the traditional industry (especially mining and metallurgy), both during capitalism (late 18th century to WW2) and during socialism (WW2 till the late 1980s). A collapse of the industrial development model has led to a rapid shrinking of the labour market, which in turn curbed the population influx by gradually reversing migration directions. Intensification of the migratory outflow results not only from the progress of the suburbanisation process, but also from search for work, especially by young people, in other agglomerations or abroad. The outflow of young people and the intensification of social changes manifested by extending the period of education and delaying the decision to start a family (usually with one child), result in a very low birth rate. In turn, exceeding the age of demographic ageing by the most numerous generation of baby boomers, born in the 1950s, strengthened by the migratory inflow to the Katowice conurbation, especially in the 1970s, gives the effect of accelerated demographic ageing (Runge, 2017). The pace of depopulation is the fastest in the largest cities of the conurbation, especially in Katowice, where in the 1980s the population amounted to 365,000 and in Bytom, Gliwice, Sosnowiec and Zabrze, where it exceeded 200,000 inhabitants (Table 1).

Table 1: Population change in the Katowice conurbation in 1999–2018

Detailed list	Population number [persons]		Population changes [in %]	Percentage of the population aged 60 and over [in %]	
	1999	2018	1999–2018	1999	2018
Silesian Voivodeship	4,776,856	4,533,565	-5.1	16.1	26.2
Katowice conurbation	2,645,160	2,416,839	-8.6	16.2	27.1
Cities (total)	1,714,669	1,511,045	-11.9	16.2	28.0
including:					
Bytom	197,660	166,795	-15.6	16.4	27.0
Sosnowiec	235,662	202,036	-14.3	16.3	31.0
Gliwice	206,552	179,806	-12.9	16.3	28.0
Zabrze	198,354	173,374	-12.6	15.3	26.3
Katowice	333,244	294,510	-11.6	17.9	29.4
Ruda Śląska	154,903	138,000	-10.9	14.8	25.0
Dąbrowa Górnicza	133,487	120,259	-9.9	15.5	29.5
Chorzów	119,501	108,434	-9.3	19.0	26.2
Tychy	135,306	127,831	-5.5	12.9	27.4
Medium-size towns (total)	646,550	610,927	-5.5	15.6	26.3
including (among others):					
Świętochłowice	57,174	50,012	-12.5	15.2	27.0
Siemianowice Śląskie	75,218	67,154	-10.7	15.9	27.8
Czeladź	35,457	31,677	-10.7	18.3	30.8
Piekary Śląskie	61,753	55,299	-10.5	16.6	26.8
Będzin	60,084	56,804	-5.5	18.5	28.8
Tarnowskie Góry	63,126	61,356	-2.8	15.4	27.2
Mysłowice	76,231	74,586	-2.2	13.9	24.1
Small towns (total)	124,205	124,001	-0.2	15.8	24.5
Rural areas (total)	159,736	170,866	7.0	18.1	23.6

Source: Own study based on Local Data Bank.

Only two medium-sized towns, Mikołów and Łaziska Górne, located in the southern outskirts of the conurbation, show an increase in the population. In addition, population growth occurs in some small towns located in the external zone of the conurbation, especially in its south-eastern part (Bieruń, Łędziny, Imielin, Sławków) and in the rural areas lying directly outside large cities (rural municipalities of Sośnicowice, Gierałtowice, Pilchowice, Ornontowice, Kobiór, Wiry, Bojszowy, Chełm Śląski, Psary, Ożarowice, Świerklaniec).

In all cities and in most medium-size towns of the Katowice conurbation, the natural loss (more deaths than births) was accompanied by a negative migration balance.

The largest natural loss in 2018 characterised cities with typically mining origins (Czeladź -7.0%, Będzin -6.0%, Sosnowiec -4.7%, Bytom -4.5%), in which this industry's collapse during the

political transformation resulted in high unemployment. In 1998–2004, the unemployment rate exceeded 20% in Bytom, Chorzów, Sosnowiec, Zabrze, Będzin, Piekary Śląskie, Siemianowice Śląskie, Świętochłowice and Jaworzno. This weakened the natural movement and contributed to the migratory outflow of young people who could not find work after graduating. In contrast, small towns (Bieruń 3.3‰, Łędziny 3.4‰, Ornontowice 4.1‰) and rural areas (Wiry 4.3‰) of the southern and south-eastern outskirts of the Katowice conurbation showed the largest natural increase.

Mining centres in which the migration balance was negative also manifested the strongest migratory outflow (Knurów -6.3‰, Bytom -5.0‰, Świętochłowice -4.4‰, Sosnowiec -4.2‰). Migration influx was noted in the rural suburbs of the conurbation covered by suburbanization processes (Ożarówice 14.8‰, Bobrowniki 14.0‰, Świerklaniec 12.5‰, Psary 12.5‰ in the northeast, and Wiry 12.4‰ and Chwałki Śląskie 11.4‰ in the south-east).

In 2018, the highest level of ageing measured by the proportion of population aged 60 and over was reached in the cities of Sosnowiec (31.0%), Dąbrowa Górnicza (29.5%) and Katowice (29.4%). A weaker progress of these processes was observed in the rural areas of the southern and the south-eastern parts of the conurbation (rural municipalities of Ornontowice, Bojszowy and Wiry), where this proportion was between 18% and 19%.

The problem of depopulation and ageing will be increasing, posing a growing challenge for the local government of Silesia and local authorities. For example, according to the demographic forecast of 2014 (Local Data Bank Statistics Poland), the population of the Silesian Voivodeship in 2050 will fall by 22.9% compared to 1999, with the situation being even worse in most major and medium-sized towns of the Katowice conurbation. For example, in Bytom, Sosnowiec, Zabrze, Świętochłowice and Siemianowice Śląskie, the expected decline in the population may exceed 40%, while in Katowice it will be 37.5%. This will be accompanied by an increase in the number of elderly people (aged 60 and over), whose proportion in the Silesian Voivodeship will increase to 41.7%, with 47.4% in Sosnowiec, 46.3% in Dąbrowa Górnicza and over 45% in Siemianowice Śląskie, Jaworzno and Świętochłowice.

Let us begin a detailed analysis of the factors influencing demographic changes with the main regional centre – Katowice. The depletion of extensive external factors of development has resulted in slowing down the population growth in the city, followed by a significant decline in the population number, among others, due to internal suburbanisation, relocation or emigration abroad. The regress of the traditional economic activity (mining, metallurgy) initiated not only emigration, but also an increase in the segmentation of the labour market, which has become a job market for specialists with high professional expertise. Hence, the emergence in Katowice – especially in its southern districts – of both modern jobs and high-quality places of residence. These processes not only intensify the internal division of the city's social space, but they also distinguish Katowice in comparison to other cities. This is proved by increased commuting to Katowice (Runge, 2014). Thus, the agglomerating model is revealed here – Katowice as a centre of work and metropolitan services and the remaining cities as centres of residence and other services. Depopulation is a problem for the functioning of the technical infrastructure and the main city facilities, especially in neighbourhoods outside the city centre. The infrastructure developed for a city of over 300,000 serves a declining number of inhabitants. Thus, the maintenance costs are rising. Yet, the infrastructure and services, especially the metropolitan ones located in the centre of Katowice benefit not only the inhabitants of the city, but also its former inhabitants, who have moved to neighbouring towns or to the suburban zone, and other visitors. This is a mechanism of forming metropolitan areas. Problems of mismatching the infrastructure to decreasing population are more apparent in other cities of the conurbation, e.g. in Sosnowiec (Krzysztofik, Runge & Kantor-Pietraga, 2012). They are important in terms of creating the city budget (taxes). Multifaceted urban shrinkage occurs in Katowice, Sosnowiec and Bytom, while in other cities this process is currently limited to depopulation.

In a group of neighbouring towns, depopulation, demographic ageing or shrinking are essentially the results of washing out development factors from the towns' hierarchical structure. The strongest effect of this process is visible in Bytom, while the local authorities of Katowice and Sosnowiec replace the already exhausted development factors with new ones, especially with services. At the same time, the effect of intervening opportunities can appear, in terms of both strengthening and weakening the population processes of the neighbouring centres. The factors washed out from one city partly cumulate in other towns, especially in medium-sized ones or in rural areas located in the external zone of the conurbation (Krzysztofik et al., 2017; Runge, 2016). However, a substantial part of the outflow from the towns of the Katowice conurbation goes outside this settlement system, outside the Silesian Voivodeship and abroad.

The population leaving the major cities of the Katowice conurbation core can be attracted by neighbouring towns that are more attractive to live in, as well as by rural municipalities. Many of them have an active local policy aimed at acquiring new inhabitants by creating favourable living conditions, as the workplace itself generally remains the same. This happens, among others, in a medium-sized town of Czeladź, which attracts residents of Sosnowiec, or in the rural municipality of Psary, which attracts inhabitants of Będzin. Creating an appropriate climate for economic investment and developing not only the technical but also the social infrastructure along with the activity of housing developers play an important role in this attraction.

The strong depopulation of Sosnowiec, also due to foreign emigration, is not accompanied by such a significant decline of the population in neighbouring Będzin. Indeed, during the economic and political transformation, Będzin experienced a strong collapse and shrinkage of the labour market and a weakening of the population growth, and the ageing process appeared much earlier here than in most of the towns of the Katowice conurbation (except for Chorzów, where depopulation and ageing appeared the earliest). However, a developed housing function, with reference to not only its own labour market but also the labour markets of neighbouring cities (Sosnowiec, Dąbrowa Górnicza) has made Będzin – along with the entire Będzin district – one of the larger suburban zones in the Katowice conurbation. In contrast, due to the historical domination of traditional industries and a significant proportion of the immigrant population in the post-war period, Sosnowiec experienced the period of economic transformation much worse. Therefore, the problem of depopulation and demographic ageing is now a much more serious problem for Sosnowiec than for Będzin.

The relationship between the business and the residential functions within a given city is best seen in Katowice. While until 1989 the main economic potential (leading industrial plants) concentrated in the northern part of the city, contemporary investment in modern technologies moved to the southern periphery of the city centre, coupled with the simultaneous depopulation of the northern part and the city centre for the benefit of suburbanisation of the southern outskirts of Katowice.

Differences in the dynamics of the population changes had a particular influence on depopulation, demographic ageing, or shrinking of cities in the Katowice conurbation. Old industrial centres that had exhausted free space for the development of housing construction (Chorzów) already in the 1970s, reported an outflow of young people. This stream of emigrants was partly taken over by the created satellite centres (Tychy) or the cities with dynamically developing industry (Dąbrowa Górnicza). However, an influx of numerous young people (also from outside the Silesian Voivodeship) in a relatively short period, after years resulted in a substantial progress of demographic ageing. Visible since the 1980s, the gradual delaying of the marriage age, the popularisation of a small family model and then a single-child family resulted in a narrowed reproduction of the population. During the political and economic transformation, and especially after Poland's accession to the EU, foreign emigration intensified, mainly among young people. While in 1988 the aforementioned cities were characterised by a very small share of the population aged 60 and over, e.g. Tychy 8.7% and Dąbrowa Górnicza 13.1%, in 2018 the proportion of the elderly population reached 27.4% in Tychy and 29.5% in Dąbrowa Górnicza.

The mentioned demographic forecast, which projects that even the cities with a huge influx of the young population in the 1960 and the 1970s (Dąbrowa Górnicza, Tychy) will show progressive depopulation and demographic ageing, should prompt decision-makers to adopt specific priorities in the urban policy.

Reaction of local governments

Cities are beginning to pursue policies aimed at limiting the outflow of population and competing with each other for new inhabitants. Hence, in the priorities of urban development, high-standard housing construction and improved service quality take a high position, which aims to attract immigrants, thus alleviating the process of demographic ageing.

Therefore, the development of increased and high-standard housing is one of the contemporary ways of mitigating the phenomenon of depopulation and demographic ageing adopted by local authorities with a view to inhibiting the outflow of the middle class and stimulating selective immigration. The point is not only to attract specialists or representatives of the creative class to the regional capital, but also to other cities of the conurbation (among others to Dąbrowa Górnicza, Tychy, Gliwice, Ruda Śląska). Paradoxically, creating housing construction in depopulating and ageing towns means investing in endogenous activities with a conscious or unconscious assumption that economically active persons are present in the labour market of mainly other cities – especially Katowice. This means the suburbanisation of these towns on a regional scale.

The second possibility is to strengthen the exogenous sector of the city, restructured after the transformation. Economic priorities – seen together with the development of the technical infrastructure – are set, among others, in Bytom or Chorzów, i.e. in cities which, due to the specificity of their spatial and functional structure, have little chance of significant development of internal suburbanisation.

Local governments' attitudes toward and activities connected with progressive depopulation (classified as one of the three states on the aforementioned interval scale) should be viewed in four basic spatial-functional relationships:

- the main city of a complex settlement system and the remaining cities;
- neighbourly relations between cities;
- relationships between the business function and the residential function within given towns;
- relationships between the economic function and the residential function within the entire conurbation.

To answer the question of what the magnitude of the activity of local authorities is in the prevention of depopulation and demographic ageing of their inhabitants, the currently implemented priorities in the development strategies of 16 cities and towns of the Katowice conurbation in the period of 2020–2030 have been analysed. Attention has been primarily focused on the development objective declared as the highest in the hierarchy. Four target groups of objectives have been obtained:

1. The first group essentially refers to the improvement of the quality of life in the city, which indicates a preference for the development of the city as a place of residence. In general, this improvement is intended to address the development of housing (including that of a superior standard), the availability of facilities of social infrastructure, in particular health care institutions, and high-quality services (Katowice, Tychy, Bytom, Sosnowiec, Będzin, Czeladź). In this group, only in Czeladź it was declared that the main priority is to stop the outflow of young inhabitants of the town by improving the quality of life. In the other cases, the context of depopulation and ageing was, at most, an element of the diagnosis in the document stating the strategy for the following years, without a clear translation into the declared strategic objectives.

2. The second group focuses on economic activities, i.e. a need to stimulate economic growth, modernise economic structures, innovate, and develop technical infrastructure (Gliwice, Tarnowskie Góry, Piekary Śląskie, Świętochłowice, Mysłowice).
3. The third group focuses on the need to co-manage the city by various stakeholders and to stimulate the inhabitants' activity in creating social capital (Siemianowice Śląskie, Zabrze).
4. The fourth group is represented by only one city (Dąbrowa Górnicza), where increasing the budget revenue by imposing new taxes and diversifying the sources of financing urban activities is the main priority in its development.

The territorial differentiation of these priorities is very interesting. While economic priorities are mainly present in the north-western part of the conurbation (Gliwice, Piekary Śląskie, Chorzów) and in Mysłowice, social priorities are characteristic of the north-eastern part (Będzin, Czeladź, Sosnowiec) and the central and southern one (Katowice, Tychy), and in the western part only in Ruda Śląska and its northern neighbour Bytom. This is not a coincidence. This differentiation stems from the existing industrial and urbanisation priorities in the Katowice conurbation and their historical variability. On the one hand, continuation of the development of industry in the western and northern parts of the conurbation in the post-war period and, on the other hand, the location of the Ironworks "Katowice" (now: Arcelormittal Poland S.A.) along with the development of the residential function in the eastern part of the analysed area confirm the previously mentioned dualism of development priorities. Therefore, it could be assumed that some local authorities see the alleviation of the problems of depopulation and demographic ageing in the development, restructuring, and modernisation of the exogenous sector of the city, and hence in stimulating the development of the labour market and economic activity. In turn, for other urban centres, the endogenous sector is more important, which is understood here as an improvement in the quality of life through the development of the housing and urban infrastructure. Curbing the adverse population changes should be a result of either of the ways.

The analysis of the aforementioned development strategies also allows formulating another conclusion. A widespread recognition of the primacy of a development pattern sometimes prevents the authors of these documents from seeing the possibilities that different changes may bring, e.g. developing the economy during demographic regression, and the ensuing consequences (opportunities) of spatial diversification of the urban policy flexibly adapting appropriate actions in different areas of the city. It should be remembered that the Katowice conurbation was formed in a turbulent process of industrialisation, which often resulted in a chaotic development of settlements near mines, smelters and other industrial plants. Most cities of the conurbation (including Sosnowiec, Dąbrowa Górnicza, Ruda Śląska, Zabrze) were formed by polycentric clustering of factory-owned housing estates and pre-existing villages. This affects their current spatial layout and internal coherence (or rather lack thereof). Therefore, in the analysed complex of cities it is important to take into consideration also the diversity of intra-urban determinants and possibilities of changes. However, none of the analysed development strategies included any intra-urban differentiation of the issues in question, their intra-urban forecasting (scenarios of possible changes), indications about the conflicting areas, barriers or prospective restrictions. Attempts at a broader inter-city territorial context were also incidental.

In conditions of depopulation and demographic ageing, consideration should be given to the new vision of the conurbation area and the creation of a new spatial order, making this space an attractive place to live, which would, however partly, inhibit the outflow of people, especially young ones (Runge et al., 2018).

The Strategy for the Silesian Voivodeship (Strategia..., 2013b) clearly emphasises the paradigm of development, both in the sphere of economy and in social matters (access to high-quality public services, creation of social integration in the territorial and the intergenerational dimension). Among the negative phenomena, the authors of the strategy only recognise the inadequate territorial coherence and integrity of the region, social exclusion or passive social attitudes in the pursuit of modernity. The priorities indicated in the document include: (1) modern economy,

(2) strengthening the development opportunities for inhabitants (among others through better access to services), (3) shaping the space to enable stability and sustainability of development processes, and (4) strengthening ties with the environment through the development of technical infrastructure. These priorities are aimed at supporting the polycentric development of the settlement structure of the region by organising development processes at the local level.

This undoubtedly positive direction of action does not take into account:

1. Different trends in economic and social changes. While after 1989 the former aimed to weaken the role of the traditional industry in the region in favour of strong reinforcement of the service sector, the population changes manifested themselves in depopulation and demographic ageing.
2. Deepening the gap between the Katowice conurbation and other complex settlement systems in Poland in terms of urbanisation trends. While in the Katowice conurbation there were phenomena of internal and shifted suburbanisation, in other complex systems in the country external suburbanisation was of considerable importance (Krzysztofik et al., 2017).
3. Apparent deepening of the processes of depopulation, demographic ageing and shrinking of towns (Krzysztofik, Runge & Kantor-Pietraga, 2011; Runge, 2017). The most disturbing trends of the transformation are especially visible in Bytom, Sosnowiec, and Dąbrowa Górnicza.

In the development of these processes, the possibilities of mutual integration of towns are weakened because:

- the process of suburbanisation now affects not only large cities, but it “goes down” the settlement hierarchy, including medium-size towns;
- thereby this highlights local and regional differences in the direction and intensity of socio-economic changes;
- depopulation of the largest cities of the conurbation causes the hierarchy of the settlement network to flatten. Competitiveness of these cities and the possibility of creating pro-development changes in the near future are decreasing. Although the availability of various service facilities is improving because of decreasing population density, at the same time, the structure of the demand for services is changing (increased demand for services by a growing group of seniors).

In this context, the senior policy is of particular importance. The negative consequences of the decline in population and the progressive ageing of society are recognised by local governments. However, as studies show (Wspieranie seniorów....., 2016), regulations on the local senior policy appear most often in strategies for solving social problems (in 63.0% of the municipalities of the Silesian Voivodeship) and less often in development strategies of the municipality (27.6% of municipalities), while only 4.7% of the municipalities have a programme or another strategic document dedicated to the senior policy. A municipal council of seniors was established only in 16.5% of the municipalities of Silesia.

Monitoring or a special study of the situation/needs of seniors in 2015 was conducted in only 8.7% of the municipalities. Over half of the surveyed municipalities (66.1%) declared organising services for the elderly, with care services being the most frequently provided. Municipalities have undertaken various initiatives in favour of seniors – most often in the field of culture and education. In addition, public space was adapted, among others, to the needs of persons with age-related reduced mobility (48.0% of municipalities). Activities to develop digital competences were also carried out. Often, municipalities organised special events for the elderly, i.e. “Seniors’ Days” or “Senioralia” (46.5%), sports activities (44.1%), as well as tourist events (41.7%). Less often, medical advice was provided in municipalities or health prevention measures were implemented (39.4%), although health issues are generally considered to be of great importance at old age.

However, the creation of the senior policy largely concerns urban municipalities; it is less implemented in urban-rural municipalities, where at least the monitoring of the seniors' needs is conducted, and rural municipalities show the least activity in terms of the senior policy.

Conclusions

In the Katowice conurbation, there is a whole spectrum of town authorities' reactions towards depopulation and demographic ageing. Therefore, it is impossible to clearly classify and rank towns in terms of their policies on preventing the effects of depopulation and ageing or actions taken (or not). However, three groups of towns can be identified:

1. Towns that notice the problem of depopulation and aging but marginalise it in development strategies. The formulated strategic goals concern stimulating the socio-economic development of the city but do not associate it with a need to prevent depopulation or aging, or to adapt the urban infrastructure to a decreasing population and the changing demographic structure. Stimulation of socio-economic development occurs only selectively through some activities (development of services, improvement in housing conditions, and less often through launching new industrial activities). This group includes, among others, Katowice, Tychy, Gliwice, Chorzów, Świętochłowice, Tarnowskie Góry, Piekary Śląskie, Mysłowice and Dąbrowa Górnicza.
2. The second group of towns notices the depopulation and ageing problem and exposes it – both in diagnosis and strategic goals, but focuses on selected activities:
 - 2.1. Improvement in housing conditions (Sosnowiec, Jaworzno, Siemianowice Śląskie, Będzin).
 - 2.2. Creating new business activities (Zabrze).
3. Only Czeladź approaches depopulation and ageing in a comprehensive, multifaceted way.

Traditions of industrial and urban development in the western and north-western part of the conurbation influence the adoption – as a priority in urban policy – of the development of the exogenous sector in order to stimulate the local labour market and increase revenues from economic activity (Gliwice, Zabrze, Ruda Śląska). However, in the north-eastern part of the conurbation, large industrial investments appeared in the 1970s, causing a large influx of workforce. During the economic transformation, the economic base of cities was significantly reduced, and these towns see a possibility of stopping the population outflow in the development of the endogenous sector, which is manifested in improving the quality of housing spaces and urban infrastructure (Dąbrowa Górnicza, Sosnowiec, Będzin, Jaworzno). Katowice, as the conurbation centre, focuses on the development of services. However, strategies developed for individual towns and the formulated urban policy too poorly adapt activities to the changing conditions.

The presented confrontation of the level of preparedness of local authorities in the Katowice conurbation to the threats posed by depopulation and demographic ageing allows formulating several conclusions.

First, the processes of depopulation and demographic ageing in the Katowice conurbation are manifested by a rapid transition into the post-productive age by numerous baby boomers, who came to work in the largest industrial investments located here until the 1980s. This is accompanied by a regress of the population at the pre-production age due to the consequences of the second demographic transition (among others, a change in the family model), youth emigration abroad and suburbanisation processes. Here, the scale of depopulation in absolute values is the largest in the country.

Second, due to the population size of the conurbation, the magnitude of the depopulation phenomenon and demographic ageing as well as its spatial differentiation, there is no comprehensive, multifaceted programme to mitigate the negative effects of these processes.

Third, economic development of the Katowice conurbation has long been focused on traditional industry based on the existing raw material base. There was no need to look for other development factors. The collapse of the industrial economic model forces local governments to seek new endogenous factors, which they often find difficult. Still, many cities, including Bytom, would like to operate based on the existing development factors (mining). Meanwhile, there is a need to seek intra-regional factors of the prospective changes in the region.

Fourth, the formulated strategies for further changes practically do not differ in terms of the location of different functional areas of the city and do not take into account, for example, the impact of internal or shifted suburbanisation on the possibility of creating a demographic policy.

Fifth, the dominant directions of the local authorities' activity in the situation of depopulation and demographic ageing are, as variants: the policy of modern industrialisation (mainly in the western part of the Katowice conurbation) or the policy of improving accessibility to services and promoting higher quality residential buildings (mainly in the eastern part of the Katowice conurbation). In both cases, the point is to keep the present inhabitants in the city and to attract new ones, which is associated with improving the quality of urban space, especially in the main cities of the conurbation (Katowice, Gliwice).

Therefore, the level of local governments' preparedness for the challenges posed by depopulation and demographic ageing should be deemed insufficient.

Sagan (2014) stated that Polish cities face challenges resulting from three overlapping processes: (1) a systemic transformation that has given the cities subjectiveness, (2) accession to the EU, (3) the globalisation and liberalisation of economies. The above analysis shows that a fourth process resulting from the effects of the second demographic transition should also be added. This proposal can also be extended to cities in other post-socialist countries (Marszałek, 2017).

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